

THE WORLD FRAGMENTED INTO ALTERNATIVE
DIMENSIONS: INTERTEXTUALITY,
VERISIMILITUDE, AND FICTION IN FÉLIX J.
PALMA'S *VICTORIAN TRILOGY*¹

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1. INTRODUCTION

The deployment of intertextuality within *El Mapa del Tiempo* and the broader *Trilogía Victoriana* by Félix J. Palma serves as a narrative enhancer, affording readers the opportunity to navigate the intricate relationship between fiction and reality. This literary engagement invites an exploration of layered meanings as diverse elements from literature and culture coalesce. Literature, on this context, emerges as a dynamic space where the dichotomy between reality and the imaginary is blurred, thereby prompting readers to interrogate their epistemological frameworks. Fundamental inquiries pertaining to the nature of truth, perception, and the construction of reality are thereby engendered.

This scrutinizes the multifaceted layers of meaning engendered by intertextuality in Palma's oeuvre. Additionally, the interplay between fiction-

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reality dynamics and temporal travel, manifesting in the superimposition of narrative layers, will be a focal point of examination. Given spacial constraints, the paper will focus on a two narrative threads, with a more exhaustive exploration of other narratives within *El mapa del tiempo* reserved for other forthcoming papers.

2. GENERAL APPROACH TO THE TREATMENT OF TIME IN CONTEMPORARY NARRATIVE

The conceptualization of time within narrative discourse has been a subject of profound consideration in literary theory, evolving across diverse theoretical paradigms. Aristotelian principles, expounded in *Poetics* (2013), advocate for three dramatic unities, including temporal unity, dictating that the action of a literary work unfolds within a delimited and coherent temporal framework to maintain narrative verisimilitude. While adherence to Aristotelian norms persisted in Spanish narrative until the verge of the contemporary era, deviations from these conventions, especially in science fiction and works featuring variable chronotopes, emerged gradually in the early 20th century.

Gerard Genette's seminal contributions to narrative theory introduced the disruption of linear temporality through flashbacks (*analepsis*) and flashforwards (*prolepsis*). An array of temporal strategies, including strategic employment of analepsis and prolepsis, serve to confer intricacy and depth to the narrative structure. Contemporary luminaries such as Julio Cortázar, evident in *Rayuela* (*Hopscotch*), have undertaken more radical experiments in temporal manipulation.

The theoretical concepts of *ordo naturalis* and *ordo artificialis*, deeply rooted in the Ciceronian rhetorical tradition, constitute pivotal elements in contemporary narrative discourse. *Ordo naturalis* pertains to the chronological sequence of events as transpiring. In rhetorical tradition, this order is deemed apt for the objective transmission of historical facts, eschewing narrative manipulation. Conversely, *ordo artificialis* entails the intentional manipulation of event sequence for stylistic or rhetorical objectives. This contrived order serves to accentuate specific narrative elements, generate suspense, or structure

the narrative more impactfully, thereby affording authors the capacity to strategically manipulate temporal dimensions for desired effects. These theoretical constructs wield considerable influence over contemporary creative writing and literary theory, exemplified by authors such as Gabriel García Márquez in *One hundred years of solitude* (*Cien años de soledad*, 1967), where *ordo artificialis* is employed to craft intricate and multidimensional narratives.

El mapa del tiempo, as the inaugural work in the *Victorian Trilogy*, initially eschews a strict adherence to chronological order or *ordo naturalis*. Despite its alignment with the realistic tradition pervasive in Spanish literature, the work features overlapping stories among characters. A heterodiegetic omniscient narrator facilitates the revelation of diverse facets of individual characters' lives, converging within the intricate tapestry of the narrative. Notably, all these narratives coalesce around a central motif, the interrelationship with H.G. Wells, acknowledged as the "father of time travel" following the resounding success of his magnum opus, *The Time Machine* (1895).

2.1. Time Travel: The Ever-Changing Landscape of Narrative Focalization

Temporal displacement, a ubiquitous motif in science fiction, has perennially captivated the creative faculties of literary luminaries, filmmakers, and discerning audiences. The prospect of traversing epochs, whether backward or forward, elicits a tapestry of intriguing and, oftentimes, confounding inquiries into the ontological essence of time, causality, and the ethical quandaries attendant upon such hypothetical journeys.

Within the annals of science fiction, the conceptualization of time travel has manifested in diverse iterations across the genre's evolutionary trajectory. From the epochal narratives of H.G. Wells—notably exemplified by the protagonist in *El mapa del tiempo*—, and the seminal work *The Time Machine* itself, to the intricate tapestries woven by contemporaneous literary authors such as Philip K. Dick, the thematic exploration of temporal paradoxes, alternate realities, and dystopian futures has persistently constituted a thematic locus. These narratives, in turn, proffer inquiries into the agency of

the individual within the historical continuum, the transformative potential inherent in altering the past, and the ethical ramifications concomitant with such actions.

A preeminent ethical trope within temporal traversals in science fiction is the ‘butterfly effect’ (Dooley, 2009), wherein seemingly inconspicuous actions in the past engender consequential and often unforeseen repercussions in the future. Such narratives compel contemplation on the moral imperatives borne by temporal sojourners and the unpredictable ethical reverberations attendant upon their interventions.

An additional ethical quandary of paramount import is encapsulated in the grandfather paradox, wherein the ethical conundrum arises as to whether temporal pilgrimages to the past, with the intent of modifying events to preclude one’s own existence, can be deemed ethically permissible. This ethical conundrum finds resonance in works like *Back to the Future* (Robert Zemeckis, 1985), scrutinizing the morality of retroactive alterations for personal gain. Furthermore, the prospect of venturing into the future engenders epistemic and ethical considerations — should one possess foreknowledge of one’s impending future, and is intervention in future events to avert tragedies ethically justifiable? These ethical quandaries find cogent expression in literary oeuvres such as Stephen King’s *The Outsider* (2018) and the *Victorian Trilogy*, wherein the protagonist, Andrew Harrington, seeks to employ a time machine to traverse to the moment of Jack the Ripper’s heinous act against his beloved Marie Kelly. As underscored by Ruiz Prieto (2021, p. 41), narratives integrating temporal transits imbue their structures with a plethora of variables, engendering permutations across diegetic time, extradiegetic temporal dimensions, narrative chronology, and the locus of narrative perspective.

The introductory assertion in the First Part of *El mapa del tiempo* encapsulates this thematic discourse:

If, akin to any sagacious individual, one postulates that time constitutes a swift current inexorably propelling all progeny towards the murkiest shore, herein lies the revelation that the past can be retraced, and man can retrace his own steps courtesy of a temporal conveyance mechanism².

² All the translated quotation of the original text are made by the author of this paper.

This critical examination of illustrative instances accentuates the inadequacies inherent in conventional hierarchies and nomenclatures when confronted with narratives delineating temporal excursions, particularly those featuring paradoxical temporal constructions. The temporal dislocation of one or more narrative elements challenges entrenched categorizations of temporal configurations in cinematic discourse, including but not limited to flashback, flashforward, parallel, or alternate montage, and disrupts established notions of causality and triggers (Ruiz Prieto, 2021, p. 347).

2.1.2. Andrew Harrington's Journey

The love story of Andrew Harrington and Marie Kelly, murdered in 1888 by the infamous Jack the Ripper, is directly inspired by Alan Moore's work, *From Hell*. Serialized in 1989 in the *Taboo* magazine and later compiled into a single volume, *From Hell* is described by its author as "the autopsy of a historical event" and as "the terrifying story of the fateful patterns that exist in time, human endeavors, and even in the stones of cities." Both *From Hell* and Félix J. Palma's *El mapa del tiempo* unfold through a complex narrative structure that intertwines historical inquiry with fictional elements. Moore employs the character of Scotland Yard inspector Frederick Abberline as the protagonist, while Palma opts for Harrington. Moore's panels are replete with symbolism and references, enriching the plot with depth and complexity. As *From Hell* progresses, readers become enmeshed in a web of intrigues transcending the murders, delving into broader issues of power, corruption, and human nature. As *El mapa del tiempo* unfolds, readers witness, from the wings, the passage of time and its capacity to stretch and contract. Eventually, the characters demonstrate their ability to traverse time as the story progresses. In terms of narrative, *From Hell* serves as a framing narrative for Andrew and Marie's story.

Their tale commences with a gift from Andrew's cousin, Charles, to his father: a portrait of a distinguished lady, none other than Marie Kelly, a prostitute depicted as a courtesan, a gift celebrated with laughter by Charles. Conversely, Andrew experiences a profound disquiet upon beholding the painting, feeling observed, entranced, bewildered, and perhaps slightly enamored: a clear allusion to courtly love (love at first sight, love at first hearing). Consequently, Andrew

decides to journey to White Chapel in search of the desired prostitute, knowing the tavern where she rests between tasks. Upon finding her, he pays for a night with her, gradually becoming captivated each night, compelling her with passion and ardor. Marie eventually feels her robust armor, constructed to safeguard her soul, cracking under the intensity of their connection. However, as Jack the Ripper begins his splurge, Marie distances herself, succumbing to nightly inebriation in that “embassy of hell” (*From Hell*), as if anticipating Jack’s approach. On the night Andrew decides to confront his father and declare his love for Marie, she is murdered by the Ripper in her quarters. When Andrew discovers her lifeless body, the narrator beseeches the reader:

[...] I need you to consider the flexibility of time, its ability to stretch or shrink like an accordion behind the backs of clocks. I am sure it is something you have experienced frequently in your own lives, depending on which side of the bathroom door you have found yourself. In the case at hand, time stretched in Andrew’s mind, fabricating an eternity with just a handful of seconds (p. 76).

In this narrative recounting Andrew and Marie’s story, intertextuality with *From Hell* merges with the passage of time and subsequently, time travel. When Andrew and Charles visit Murray’s Time Travel Agency to request a journey to the past, Mr. Murray asserts the impossibility of arbitrary time movement—he can only transport clients to the year 2000. However, he suggests that H.G. Wells might possess a time machine, planting the seed of inspiration for his famous novel. The two youths then visit Wells, coercing him at gunpoint to send Andrew to 1888 to thwart the Ripper and save Marie. Although successful, upon returning to the future, nothing has changed. Wells, matter-of-factly, informs him that he has created a parallel reality, “a fork in time [...]. And in that world, Mary Kelly is alive and happy alongside her other self.” Wells thus introduces the concept of alternate universes, echoing *Back to the Future II* (Robert Zemeckis, 1989) (“Imagine this line represents time [...]. Somewhere in the past, the timeline veered off at a tangent, creating an alternate 1985. Alternate for me, for you, and for Einstein, but real for everyone else”).

The resolution, aligned with the pervasive realism permeating the entire text, proves anticipated: Wells’s machine is nothing more than a collector’s item;

the time travel has been a charade orchestrated by Charles with Murray and Wells' assistance. Andrew remains oblivious to this fact, enabling him to rest peacefully and disentangle himself from that moment in the past.

3. TEMPORAL JOURNEYS SANS APPARATUS: THE PECULIAR GENOME OF H.G. WELLS IN *LA MÁQUINA DEL TIEMPO*

Explorations of time travel within the realm of science fiction, absent mechanical contrivances, provide a compelling avenue for the examination of philosophical and existential concepts. By eschewing conventional mechanical frameworks, these narratives beckon viewers, and readers to delve into the intricacies of the human psyche and its intricate relationship with temporality. Whether through introspection, non-linear perceptual constructs, or fluid identity delineations, these chronicles confront temporal norms, proposing the prospect that time travel may constitute a more internally intrinsic experience than an externally facilitated one, a mental, rather than mechanical, undertaking. Furthermore, the machine-independent approach to time underscores the pivotal role of the human psyche in the conceptualization and manipulation of temporal dimensions. The protagonists utilize introspective faculties, expanded consciousness, and an enhanced comprehension of reality as tools for their temporal odysseys, sparking fundamental inquiries into reality's nature. Through their temporal journeys, the protagonists prompt profound reflections on reality and the human ability to surpass perceived temporal limitations.

The thematic motif of time travel has perennially enthralled audiences across diverse artistic mediums, spanning from novels to cinematic productions. While conventional time machines, exemplified prominently in the *Terminator* series, are commonplace in the portrayal of temporal sojourns, select works have probed the phenomenon sans recourse to mechanical temporal engineering. This more abstract exploration of time travel becomes a fertile terrain for philosophical contemplation and inquiry into the essence of existence.

A salient instance of this machine-independent exploration is evident in the film *The Butterfly Effect* (Eric Bress, 2004) and its literary counterpart. In this oeuvre, the protagonist, portrayed by Ashton Kutcher onscreen, discerns the ability to retrogress through his own life, effecting alterations to events and discerning the

colossal consequences of these minute modifications in his present and future. Lacking a tangible time machine, the central character accesses his own temporal antecedents through introspection and cognitive focus. This representation accentuates the proposition that time travel may be more aptly characterized as a mental or spiritual phenomenon than a mechanistic endeavor. The sheer potency of the human mind, or conceivably an expanded consciousness, emerges as the propellant behind temporal manipulations.

Another work delving into this machine-independent exploration is Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse-Five* (1969). The narrative traces the life of the protagonist, Billy Pilgrim, whose temporal experiences deviate from linearity due to encounters with extraterrestrial entities termed Tralfamadorians. These entities instruct Billy in perceiving time simultaneously, envisaging his life as a series of discrete snapshots rather than a linear progression. This departure from conventional temporal conventions suggests that human comprehension of reality is circumscribed by its linear temporal experience. Here, time travel transcends mere physicality, metamorphosing into a transformation of perception and understanding.

The science fiction genre, in embracing the notion of the human mind as the conduit for temporal voyages, finds exemplification in Isaac Asimov's *The End of Eternity* (1955). Within this narrative, an organization named Eternity operates beyond the confines of time, endowed with the capability to effect 'adjustments' in the temporal continuum to optimize the future (which strongly resembles the Spanish series *El Ministerio del Tiempo*, created by Javier and Pablo Olivares in 2015, although there the characters travel through doors). Despite the absence of conventional time-manipulating machinery, characters within the novel traverse temporal epochs mentally, engendering alterations to historical events. This narrative trajectory propels philosophical interrogations pertaining to the role of the human mind in temporal manipulation and the ethical considerations attendant to such interventions.

Agent Clayton, who has developed certain special abilities throughout the course of his profession, discloses to Wells what he is:

—You are... a time traveler —Clayton announced solemnly. Wells looked at him bewildered, then burst into laughter.

—Why on earth would you think that? Because I wrote *The Time Machine*? I think you're overly obsessed with my novels, Agent.

Clayton smiled coldly.

—As I've already mentioned, I've dealt with the impossible in my line of work—he responded.

—Have you encountered individuals who come from the future in machines like the one I invented?—Wells laughed.

—Yes and no—mysterious Clayton said—. I've come across some time travelers, yes. Although I'm afraid they prefer to travel in a different way (*El mapa del Cielo*, p. 501).

This “different way” involves activating a gene in their heads, which, as Wells later discovers, activates when they are afraid or extremely unsettled. Clayton points out that he is “the oldest time traveler I've known”, and that “in the future, a government program will be created to teach time travelers how to use their talent”, reminiscent of Asimov's novel and the Spanish series by the Olivares brothers. Wells's journey through time is traumatic, as it could not be otherwise, since time travel—or in space, as in *Harry Potter*—can cause dizziness and various ailments:

Wells felt how he was being reconstructed step by step by an invisible hand, which in an instant screwed his scattered bones into the framework of the skeleton, to which it tied the circulatory system and the garlands of nerves, then distributed a handful of organs along the improvised framework, and finally packaged everything with the brown paper of flesh. With the final varnish of skin, the writer suddenly felt struck by cold, fatigue, nausea, and other ailments inherent to the body he had always carried, anchoring him to reality like an anchor (p. 678).

In the past to which he arrives, Wells manages to kill The Envoy, who is a mysterious character who appears in the this second novel of the trilogy. The Envoy is an extraterrestrial being who arrives on Earth with a specific purpose, but his identity and motivations are enigmatic and revealed

gradually throughout the story. He is a crucial character in the novel's plot, and his presence triggers a series of events that affect the protagonists and the course of history.

When Wells, disguised as the sailor Griffin in Antarctica, destroyed the *Envoy*, and in doing so he saves the lives of Reynolds and the sailor Allan, who is none other than the great writer Edgar Allan Poe. In fact, he never goes to the secret crypt of the Natural History Museum, so he never offers his blood to *The Envoy*, and thus, *The Envoy* does not survive. Therefore, he manages to change the past, present, and future with respect to his timeline: the Martian invasion never occurred, extraterrestrials never enslaved souls, and the tragic death of Charles in the labor camp he shares with other broken souls, like Captain Shackleton, will never happen.

Moreover, it is noteworthy that Wells cannot refrain from approaching his young self, nor his adult self, this time as a friend of Murray, not his mortal enemy. In the first case, he seeks out his younger self and "gifts" him with some arguments to inspire novel writing; in the second case, he works as Murray's coachman, allowing him to be close to Wells whenever Monty and Emma visit. The coachman Wells initiates conversations that seem peculiar to the parallel universe Wells: firstly, when the latter gazes at the former, he feels dizzy and sad; and secondly, he is overcome by a deep melancholy: "that strange melancholy which lately assailed him suddenly had returned, confirming his suspicions that the presence of the coachman had something to do with it" (*El mapa del caos*, p. 260).

On the other hand, the coachman Wells, the time traveler, realizes that not all Wells are alike:

That was what didn't fit: the suit, the checkered suit worn by his twin! With a shudder, Wells recalled seeing that suit in the display window of the tailor shop where he usually made his purchases. After much contemplation, trying to determine whether that bold pattern was elegant or ridiculous, he had decided to play it safe and acquire a similar dark brown suit to the ones he typically wore (*El mapa del Cielo*, p. 728).

Thus, the time traveler wonders how many twins he has, how many universes have been saved: “How many of his twins had witnessed the annihilation of mankind?” he asked himself with a shudder. “In how many worlds would the clumsiness or inefficiency of the writer H.G. Wells be to blame for the extinction of humanity?” (*El mapa del Cielo*, p. 737).

It is important to emphasize the brilliant use of the *doppelgänger* concept and the intricacies related to identity, akin to Hitchcock's *Vertigo* (1958), masterfully interwoven into the intricate plot threads shaping *El mapa del tiempo*, adding layers of both complexity and narrative depth. As evidenced, Félix J. Palma's work demonstrates rich intertextuality with other literary and cinematic works exploring the theme of time travel. Due to constraints, a comprehensive exploration of these references is deferred to subsequent publications.

4. CONCLUSIONS

The *Victorian Trilogy* by Félix J. Palma artfully engages with the notion that H.G. Wells transcends the role of a mere chronicler of time travel, evolving into an active participant in temporal narratives. This amalgamation of reality and fiction within the persona of Wells introduces nuanced layers of contemplation concerning the fundamental nature of literary creation and its profound capacity to shape perception and experience.

The complex portrayal of H.G. Wells in Félix J. Palma's *Victorian Trilogy* not only serves as a reverential gesture towards the author and his enduring impact on the science fiction genre but also operates as a sophisticated vehicle for the exploration of overarching themes encompassing literature, ethical considerations, ontological realities, and the pervasive influence of intellectual constructs on societal paradigms. Wells assumes a pivotal role within the intricate tapestry of the narrative, significantly enhancing the complexity and profundity of Palma's scrutiny into the realms of temporal displacement and the interconnected dimensions of reality and fiction.

Regrettably, within the confines of this chapter, it proves unfeasible to fully encapsulate the expansive realm of intertextuality and the nuanced

significance embedded within Palma's oeuvre. Consequently, readers are urged to anticipate forthcoming scholarly inquiries that extend beyond the current scope. These prospective studies might encompass not only the intricate web of intertextual references but also the intricate interplay between reality and fiction and the strategic deployment of the multiverse as a structural framework. Among other dimensions, a meticulous examination of the deployment of steampunk in this narrative should be mandatory to be explored. It is noteworthy that the steampunk aesthetic, a retrofuturistic genre not commonly found in Spanish literary traditions, continues to exude a profound realism, an aspect warranting further scholarly exploration.

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